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## 'Yippee' — Paul Mazursky Witnesses Chasids Gone Wild

by Tom Tugend, Contributing Editor

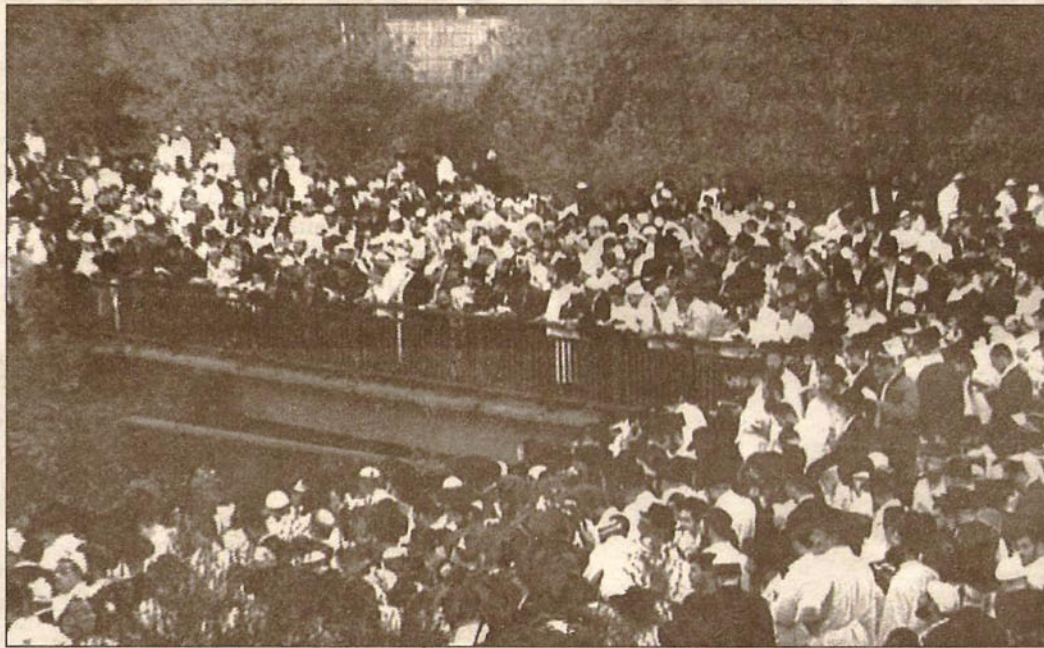
In all his 76 years, filmmaker Paul Mazursky had never seen anything like the 25,000 Chasidim singing, swaying, blowing shofars and dancing around a lake.

"It's like the old days at the Apollo in Harlem, with the crowd going wild," the irreverent Mazursky said. "Can you dig it?"

The scene is from his documentary, "Yippee: A Journey to Jewish Joy," which had its Southland premier this week at the Palm Springs International Film Festival. The film is quite a change of pace for the creator of such quirky social comedies and dramas as "Bob&Carol&Ted&Alice," "Harry and Tonto," "Next Stop, Greenwich Village," "An Unmarried Woman," "Down and Out in Beverly Hills" and "Enemies: A Love Story."

Despite his artistic reputation and string of Oscar nominations, Mazursky has found it increasingly difficult to find backing for his iconoclastic movies, which are infused with his wry take on the human condition.

During the past decade, after a quadruple heart bypass operation, Mazursky has gone back to his roots as an actor and comedian, including parts in HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and "The Sopranos," while looking for the right combination of film and financing.



More than 25,000 — mostly Chasidic — Jews from around the world were expected to visit the Ukrainian town of Uman for three days of praying, singing and dancing. Photo courtesy National Center for Jewish Film

But last year, he and his two camera crews found themselves in Uman, a Ukrainian town of 80,000, whose population swells every Rosh Hashanah during an invasion of ecstatic Chasidim dressed in white kitels (robes), black suits or streimels (fur hats).

They come to pray at the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, the great Chasidic master, disputatious *tzadik* (learned scholar) and great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement. Nachman was buried in Uman in 1811 at the age of 38.

What had brought the insistently secular Mazursky to Uman were the urgings of three disparate Angelenos: David Miretsky, his optometrist; Shmuel Levy, a devout Moroccan-born rock musician; and Rabbi Ezriel Tauber.

All three regularly participated in the pilgrimage to Uman, and they promised Mazursky that he would witness an event unlike any he had ever experienced.

Putting up \$50,000 of his own money, and with his broken arm in a sling, Mazursky embarked on the adventure with his friends and a six-man crew, including his son-in-law.

During a brief layover in Munich, he warmed up by filming the beer-swilling Oktoberfest, before stopping in Kiev, where his grandfather is buried, and then reaching Uman after a three-hour drive.